

critical digest

VOL. IV No.9

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

The Number-Biltmore, 10/30/51. Paul Vroom and Irving Cooper present a new melo-drama by Arthur Carter. Dane Clark and Martha Scott are starred. Feature performers include Murvyn Vye and Jennie Goldstein. Directed by George Abbott...Barefoot in Athens-Martin Beck, 10/31/51. The Playwrights Company present Maxwell Anderson's new play on Socrates. Barry Jones is featured. Staged by the playwright's son, Alan Anderson, settings by Boris Aronson...Top Banana-Winter Garden, 11/1/51. Phil Silvers stars in Michael Sloane-Paula Stone musical comedy with lyrics and music by Johnny Mercer, book by Hy Kraft.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on Page 3

The Fourposter-Barrymore, 10/24/51. Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn scored in Playwright Company's production of Jan de Hartog's two character comedy. Daily critics all praised husband and wife team, several placing them in the Lunt and Fontanne category. Jose Ferrer's direction also received plaudits. But Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Watts, Post, found the slight domestic plot too common place to recommend for an evening's entertainment. Atkinson, Times, rated it literate, professional and the pleasantest comedy of the season. Coleman, Mirror, suggested that acting students could study Miss Tandy's fine diction. Several noted women will enjoy it most.

Music in the Air-Ziegfeld, 10/8/51. Split decision rendered by six weekly reviewers on Reginald Hammerstein revival of Kern-Hammerstein musical. Time, Billboard and Variety critics rated score as tops, but thought book was too dated and production too dull to merit praise. Bron, Variety, thinks Oscar Hammerstein II should have realized that the 1932 script would seem incredible corn today. But Newsweek, New Yorker and Cue aisle-men looked at operetta with feelings of sentiment and nostalgia. As such they recommended it highly. Jane Pickens, Dennis King, Conrad Nagel and Charles Winninger received mild praise.

Glad Tidings-Lyceum, 10/11/51. Weekly critics panned Harold Bromley's production of Edward Mabley's new comedy starring Melvyn Douglas and Signe Hasso. Most took issue with author's billing of his script as "romantic comedy." Francis, Billboard, who had viewed play in summer tryout, found it vastly improved, but still lacking in guts for Broadway. Newsweek man found elements of bad taste, while Time critic thought script suffered from author's clumsy, indelicate touch. Gabriel, Cue, feared that in spite of its stars it sounds like Niagara of small nonsense. Gibbs, New Yorker, rated it as a mere collection of sorry cliches on one anecdote.

Don Juan in Hell-Carnegie Hall, 10/22/51. Paul Gregory's production of First Drama Quartette "reading" of Shaw's third act of Man and Superman won complete critical approval of newspaper appraisers. To a man they agreed that Charles Laughton, Cedric Hardwicke, Charles Boyer and Agnes Morehead brought first real theatre of season to Broadway in their one night stand. The group will play a limited four weeks engagement at the Century Theatre starting November 29th. Minor objections were that Carnegie Hall sound system was not functioning properly, and that Charles Boyer's accent was a little difficult to understand. Otherwise everything was just about perfect.

' News & Notes '

John Beaufort to cover theatre, films, TV for daily edition of Christian Science Monitor.

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 ' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr. Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonwealth |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

- Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32.

None: 10-14-21-26. So-So: 31.

BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51

- Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-25-27-28.

None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-30-31-32-33.

BORSCHT CAPADES-9/17/51

- Con: 1-2-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-21-25-27-28-30.

None: 12-14-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-31-32-33.

BUY ME BLUE RIBBONS-10/17/51

- Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-18-23./29-30-31-32-33.

None: 12-13-14-15-16-17-19-20-21-22-24-25-26-27-28

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/51

- Con: 19-22-26-28. None: 10-14-21-23.

DIAMOND LIL'-9/14/51

- "All critics for Mae, per usual, but against play."

GLAD TIDINGS-10/11/51

- Con: 1-2-4-5-6-7-18. None: 10-12-13-14-15-16-17-

19-20-21- 22-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

- Con: 26. None: 10-21.

LACE ON HER PETTICOAT-9/4/51

- Con: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-15-16-17-18-19-20-23-24-25-28-

30-33.

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

- Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

- Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26.

MUSIC IN THE AIR-10/8/51

- Con: 5-6-7-8-15-23. 30-31-32-33.

None: 12-13-14-16-17-19-20-21-22-24-25-26-27-28-29

REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51

- Con: 1-7-16-18-21-30-33. 30-31-32-33.

None: 12-13-17-22-24-26-27-28-31.

SAINT JOAN-10/4/51

- Con: 2-4-6-15-23. 30-31-32-33.

None: 12-13-14-16-17-19-20-21-22-24-25-26-27-28-29

SEVENTEEN-6/22/51

- Con: 2-4-7-26-29-30-33. None: 10-21-22-27-28-32.

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS-10/16/51

- Con: 1-3-5. None: 9-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21

22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

- Con: 33. So-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-11-21-26-27-28-31.

STALAG 17-5/8/51

- Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 4. None: 10-21-22-31.

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51

- Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33. So-So: 31.

None: 10-15-21-22.

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

- Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-27-28-31-32.

 ' Book Notes '

Maxwell Anderson's Barefoot in Athens published by William Sloane...Leon Morse, Billboard, writing novel...Dodd Mead's "Best Plays of 1950-1951" edited by John Chapman News, contains Bell Book and Candle, Guys and Dolls, The Country Girl, Second Threshold, Affairs of State, Darkness at Noon, the Rose Tattoo, the Autumn Gardner, Season in the Sun, and Billy Budd.

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' Green Room Department :
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NEW CRITIC RATED...Variety surveying the hectic critical activity credited Kerr, Herald Tribune, with the best quip of the week when he observed that Buy Me Blue Ribbons producer Jay Robinson, "is suffering delusions of adequacy." Trade paper noted that Commonwealth critic, recently named "guest" critic of daily for fall season, maintained a readable perceptive level in his first week's notices after being hog-tied by A Sleep of Prisoners.

MINORITY REPORTS...Five columnists filed diverse reviews on current shows. Farrell, WT&S, found the much panned Faithfully Yours an hilarious treatment of psychiatry...Lindsay and Crouse proved they know nothing about jazz in Remains To Be Seen, complains Kilgallen, Journal American...Kenny, Mirror, thinks the drama critics covered Bagels and Yox a week too soon, not it's great...Buy Me Blue Ribbons is worth seeing for the three supporting players, recommends Walker, News; while Shull, Show Business predicts the Jay Robinson play is destined to be loved by the American people. Latter thinks it will earn huge profits from endless stock productions, and should get \$100,000 from the film companies.

ANTI ANTA...Why doesn't ANTA honor deserving show folk at its fund raising events, instead of honoring people like Elsa Maxwell, insists Eaton, LI Press. ANTA evidently feels true theatre craftsmen aren't worthy of its supreme esteem and that Miss Maxwell can outdraw the theatre's own at the box office. ANTA is paying tribute to her at the Hotel Plaza on October 26th.

OUT OF TOWN...The time is here when almost every production will have a break-in on the summer circuit, Jose Ferrer told Sylvester, News...Arthur Lesser, Two on the Aisle producer will never open a show on the road in the summer again, he told Morehouse, WT&S. The musical got good notices, but business in Philadelphia was poor. The worst thing a manager can do, the producer stated, is to believe the out of town notices.

TICKET SOLUTION...The "Minute Women of America" may be able to solve the ticket situation in New York, suggests Durling, Journal American. The average man should not be shut out of the big shows by prohibitive prices.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Love and Let Love-Plymouth, 10/19/51. Ginger Rogers' courage and gowns drew top honors from weary daily reviewers who unanimously panned Louis Verneuil's script as just about impossible. Though there was a slight difference in critics views of acting, most agreed with Atkinson, Times, who summed it up as hackneyed, empty, and almost aggressively uninteresting. Watts, Post, and Hawkins, WT&S, praised the star for her courage in sticking to such a play during its widely publicized out of town troubles. Chapman, News, sees the play as part of a Hollywood plot to prove that "movies are better than ever." Best entertainment he has seen recently is picture "An American in Paris." Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Sheaffer, Eagle, didn't think Rogers had enough technical skill to carry her own part. Supporting cast did as well as expected in Anthony B. Farrel production.

Faithfully Yours-Coronet, 10/18/51. Two critics thought Ann Sothern and Robert Cummings were worth seeing in Richard W. Krakeur's production of L. Bush Fekete and Mary Helen Fay's adaptation of French play by Jean Bernard Luc. But most daily appraisers thought it was simply an out of date farce on psychoanalysis. Paul Morrison's penthouse setting and Sothern's gowns were praised. Watts, Post, apologized to Jay Robinson's Buy Me Blue Ribbons, which was better than this in acting and script. Field, Newark News, found it enjoyable, giddy farce, while WCBS Leonard recommended it if you are abnormal enough to enjoy solid talent regardless of what it's up to.

' Meet the Critic - Ethel Colby '

TV can never aid the theatre except via theatrical advertising, Ethel Colby told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. The Journal of Commerce drama editor and critic, who is also an experienced broadcaster, believes that nothing can touch the magic of the living theatre. The scope of TV isn't broad enough to compete with either theatre or motion pictures, she explained. TV does provide frequent and constant entertainment for those who can't afford it, and nothing more.

New York's only female daily drama reviewer is probably the only critic with professional acting experience. J.J. Shubert placed her in a leading role of The Student Prince at age 15 after he had seen her in a playlet by Edgar Allen Wolfe, produced by Leonard Sillman. She appeared in many Shubert products and then went into vaudeville as a singing single. Her last Broadway role was in Moss Hart's The Fabulous Invalid, a fact that even Hart doesn't recall. Because she has been on the other side of the footlights she tries to have a more sympathetic approach to the acting and production problems. Incidentally, she agrees with John Houseman's slam at critics in October's Harper's.

The switch from actress to critic didn't come overnight. After her marriage to Julius J. Colby, current advertising manager of Variety, she assumed the role of wife and mother. In 1940 when her husband was theatrical advertising manager and drama critic of Journal of Commerce, he became ill. She substituted for him for a month on a trial basis and has held the position ever since. She views her role as drama critic for this national business daily as a sympathetic spectator. Writing for a group of highly cultivated gentlemen she admits her views do not always reflect popular taste. There is a definite appeal, she feels, for the kind of gay, light-hearted comedy that used to last a season, but now only lasts a week or so.

Currently she broadcasts daily over WMCA, NY, as "Miss Hollywood" plus doing commercials on several TV programs. Last season she had a short-lived TV interview show which may return soon. The popular "Mr and Mrs Goes to the Theatre" program, featuring the Colbys' views on the first nights, was broadcast at midnight over WMCA for eight years. The pair, who often stated their opinions of a poor play in one or two sentences, were probably the first Mr and Mrs team on the air. The Mr and Mrs program started as an accident. After leaving the Journal of Commerce post, Mr. Colby joined WMCA as advertising manager and drama critic. One evening while interviewing Paul Lukas and Mady Christians on his regular program, Miss Christians spilled some liquid on her dress. To fill air time, Mrs. Colby entered the conversation. The station liked the idea so much they were assigned to cover the first nights. With a delightful sense of humor the femme reviewer bills herself as the "girl who can do any job her husband leaves."

' Legit Stuff '

Shows that closed include The Rose Tattoo...Ticket agencies protesting Office of Price Stabilization rollback to 75 cents fee per ticket...Rockefeller Foundation granted \$47,500 to New Dramatists Committee...Elinor Morgenthau New Dramatists Workshop dedicated at City Center...Biltmore Theatre sold by George Abbott and Warner Brothers to Irving Maidman...Guys and Dolls cast "adopted" French child under Foster Parents Plan for Children...New York State Community Theatre Association elected Mrs. John P. Fitzgerald president...Lambs reelected Bert Lytell shepherd...Uta Hagen honored by Community Service Society's Women's Council...Lee Strasberg will lecture on "Theatre in Israel" at the New School October 28th...Seventeen cast and staff presenting drama seminar at four Saturday morning lectures at Straubemuller Textile High School, presented by School Art League.

